

The Caribbean PEPFAR Laboratory Strengthening System Launches SLMTA

The PEPFAR Caribbean Regional Laboratory Health Systems Strengthening team is now proud to join the celebrated group of SLMTAs worldwide. For the very first time, SLMTA has been introduced to the Caribbean Region with the involvement of 23 persons who represented twelve separate laboratories across four countries (Barbados, Jamaica, Trinidad and Bahamas). To reinforce the Caribbean PEPFAR Laboratory Strengthening initiatives aimed at implementing quality management systems towards achieving accreditation of laboratories using the stepwise approach, the CDC Caribbean Regional Office in collaboration with its PEPFAR Laboratory Implementing Partner, the African Field Epidemiology Network (AFENET), organized the first module of the SLMTA training workshop from May 16-19 2011 in Port of Spain, Trinidad.



Caribbean SLMTA Group 16th-19th May 2011 Trinidad

The SLMTA program has been in operation since 2009. In Africa, 18 countries have participated in SLMTA training of trainers program (TOT) and 14 of them have begun rolling out the training package with evidence of solid improvements in laboratory quality systems and accreditation. It is exciting to see that the Caribbean Region has now embraced this initiative. The WHO-AFRO stepwise process and the checklist associated with that plan was adaptable to meet the specific needs of the Caribbean Laboratories as noted by both trainees and trainers.

This workshop was conducted by two of the most qualified SLMTA trainers, Mr. Nqobile Ndlovu of AFENET (Uganda) and Mr. Talkmore Maruta of the Clinton Health Access Initiative (Lesotho), whose mastering of the subject matter in SLMTA was well received and highly appreciated by the trainees.



Facilitator Talkmore Maruta demonstrates process mapping

The CDC Implementing Partner, AFENET, was given the task to conduct baseline assessments (gap analysis) of four laboratories in the PEPFAR Caribbean Regional Program focus countries that included Trinidad, Bahamas, Barbados and Jamaica. These assessments were done with a slightly modified version of the WHO-AFRO checklist. At the end, customized quality improvement implementation plans were developed for each laboratory based on their results and areas for improvement identified. The next step was for each laboratory to start the training and quality improvement efforts described under the SLMTA Framework, which would assist in removing the present non conformities and build the QMS.



Participants involved in a group exercise

Upon completion of this SLMTA workshop, each participant was required to choose a problem situation that was a topic of interest in their laboratory and develop an improvement project around it. For the next 3 months, they are expected to gather data, monitor their chosen indicators and suggest possible solutions for minimizing or solving these problems. The results will be presented in September at the Module 2 SLMTA Workshop in power point and submitted as a short narrative to show implementation of the

principles of laboratory quality improvement. In general, participants were enthusiastic about their projects that ranged from monitoring specimen rejection rates to reducing turn-around time within the hospital system as well as monitoring environmental conditions and their impact on quality outcomes.

Utilizing the milestones set and the mix of responsibilities in each laboratory, the participants were able to customize the lessons learnt along with the tools given and focus on the areas most in need of improvement. To promote teamwork and ensure motivation, each laboratory received a certificate from the Facilitators, acknowledging that the laboratory was moving toward a strengthened quality management system with the assistance of the PEPFAR Caribbean Laboratory Health Systems Strengthening team via the SLMTA Program.

Follow up visits to all these laboratories by the AFENET mentors have already been scheduled from early June until August and the participants have agreed to form a network of SLMTA trainees for sharing ideas, examples and offering assistance to each other, to ensure that everyone accomplishes the goals they have set out.

Other Updates of PEPFAR Caribbean Lab Technical Working Group Include:

1) Training and setting-up of Dried Tube Specimen (DTS) and Digital PT programs for EQA monitoring in 11 countries

In March 2011, AFENET trained laboratory staff from eleven countries supported by the Caribbean PEPFAR program on the use of Dried Tube Specimen (DTS) technology for Quality Assurance of HIV testing. These countries have now implemented this technology to monitor the quality of HIV testing. AFENET is working closely with the countries to ensure effective implementation, including adequate use of standardized logbooks to capture all testing and quality information, monitoring and evaluation to ensure quality improvement in HIV diagnosis. All staff from the eleven countries were also trained on the use of the HealthMetrx (Canada) Digital Proficiency Testing Informatics system to order panels, test, submit results and follow-up corrective actions to improve the overall quality of the clinical laboratory services. The first PT panels from HealthMetrx are expected to be delivered in June 2011. The laboratories will participate in at least 3 test events per year. Continuous monitoring will be carried out to ensure the effectiveness of this initiative.

2) National Laboratory Strategic Plan Development

The Caribbean PEPFAR Laboratory Working Group through its implementing partner, AFENET is currently working with regional governments in the development of their National Laboratory Strategic plans to provide a chartered course or road map for improvement and strengthening the provision and delivery of quality laboratory services and systems. This initiative is currently ongoing in two countries in the first instance (Barbados and Trinidad). The AFENET team just concluded the Stakeholders meeting with the Barbados Ministry of Health (MOH) and is in the process of developing the first draft plan for comments. This will be followed by further in country meetings and refinement of the document that will culminate in the official launching of the Barbados National Laboratory Strategic Plan. The team has also completed an initial site visit and formal discussions with the Trinidad and Tobago MOH and is in the process of organizing its Stakeholders meeting. This initiative will continue in the other countries in the near future.



Participants at the Barbados National Laboratory Strategic Plan development meeting

3) Equipment purchased for Twelve Countries

To support Laboratory testing and strengthen the capacity of each country in providing HIV surveillance, care and treatment, several crucial pieces of laboratory equipment have already been purchased and shipped to the twelve PEPFAR supported countries. Working together with the Laboratory Directors, the PEPFAR program has ensured that each country can now offer the basic testing needs and access support services from the five larger referral hubs in Barbados, Trinidad, Jamaica, Suriname and Bahamas; particularly for the molecular platforms that are not feasible in the smaller countries. This will



Chargé d' Affaires Dr. Brent Hardt (far left) of US Embassy Barbados commissions a new CD4 machine in St. Lucia

be implemented through the proposed Caribbean Regional Referral and Back-up Laboratory Networks. Loss of time and resources caused by machine downtime and extra regional outsourcing will now be significantly lowered as a result of these networks.